

# GOCONG

## SIDELINED TO SOARING

BY ERIC BURDICK

PHILADELPHIA EAGLES STARTER Chris Gocong was one of the best pass rushers in Mustang football history.

The defensive end recorded 42 career sacks and a school-record 23.5 sacks as a senior in 2005 en route to the Buck Buchanan Award, presented to the nation's best defensive player in the Football Championship Subdivision.

In the National Football League however, Gocong is a strongside linebacker, operating on the strong side of the Eagles' 4-3 defense.

"I'm new at the job, so I might be thinking a little bit too much," said the four-year Mustang letter winner. "As I get more experience, I'm not going to think as much, so I'll be faster and more aggressive. That's been the big thing for me."

the 2007 preseason arrived in August.

"Things have been going pretty well," said Gocong, who married his longtime girlfriend, Mandy, last summer. "Coaches have been spending more time with me. Every day has been a learning experience."

The Eagles went 2-2 in the preseason and Gocong started all four games, recording four solo tackles.

"The preseason was a good learning experience, and I'm still learning with every game," Gocong said. "I'm feeling more comfortable as a linebacker. I don't have to think as much as a linebacker; I'm just reacting now. I think as we move forward, my play is going to get faster and faster."

Gocong was one of two Mustangs on NFL rosters when the

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Gocong's responsibilities are considerably different from his playing days at Cal Poly.

"Chris probably is doing the farthest from what he did at Cal Poly as far as rushing the quarterback," said Mustang defensive coordinator Payam Saadat. "Instead, he's dropping into coverage, covering the tight end and scraping toward the run play at best."

A third-round draft choice of the Eagles and the 71st overall pick in April 2006, Gocong spent the entire 2006 season on the injured reserve list with a herniated disk in his neck, an injury suffered in the preseason.

"It was very tough the first month or so, sitting out the whole year, but then I decided I'm going to make the best of it," said the 6-foot, 2-inch, 263-pound Gocong. "I worked on the playbook inside and out. I was pretty much back to full health within eight weeks." During the off-season, Gocong worked his way up the depth chart, eventually landing the No. 1 job by the time

2007 regular season opened in early September. The other was defensive back Courtney Brown with the Dallas Cowboys.

Gocong cited two major differences between college football and the NFL.

"The biggest thing is the speed, and the second part is the business aspect," Gocong said. "Everything is so much bigger. There's added pressure and there is a lot less understanding every game."

The Carpinteria High School graduate also realizes that the life of an NFL player averages only three to four years.

"I can be there one day and gone the next."

Should the latter happen, Gocong can always fall back on his Cal Poly engineering degree. In fact, he applies some of that knowledge now.

"Football is all about vectors, angles and speed," said Gocong. "It's pure physics. All football players know it but just don't realize that fact." □



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